

PREPRINT

**Household formation, inheritance and class-formation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland:  
evidence from County Fermanagh**

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At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Irish social structure was dominated by a class of small landholders. Average farm size was 38.9 acres in 1911 compared to 35.7 in 1861. Just over half of all landholdings were between 5 and 30 acres in size, a proportion that had changed little since the middle of the previous century (Turner 1996: 86 and 89, Tables 3.8 and 3.9). The distinctive ‘stem family’ pattern of marriage and inheritance, supposed to have been practiced by this smallholding class, acquired an iconic status through its representation in the classic ethnographic study carried out by Arensberg and Kimball (2001 [1940]) in the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> But the small farm households observed by the anthropologists resulted from an extended process of simplification of the rural social structure since before the Great Famine of 1845-1850. Since the pioneering work of K.H. Connell (1950), this social transformation has been conceived as a rupture in Irish patterns of household formation: from early marriage and partible inheritance within a simple family system before the Famine, to late marriage and impartible inheritance within a stem family system in its aftermath.

More recent empirical scholarship, (described in further detail below), has cast doubt on this classic representation, raising the possibility of greater continuity across the Famine divide. In addition, scholars have identified a number of conceptual shortcomings in the structural-functionalist model of household formation inherited from Arensberg and Kimball, including a failure to account for processes of adaptation and change, and inadequate attention to the relationships between households and the wider family and kinship environment. This chapter makes a contribution to this developing scholarship through a detailed examination of household and landholding patterns in two

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the significance of Arensberg and Kimball’s classic monograph in Irish social science see Byrne, Edmondson and Varley (2001).

parishes in County Fermanagh between 1821 and 1862. The analysis draws principally on a sample of households from the surviving census schedules for 1821, supplemented by land valuation data from 1832 and 1862, and by data from published census sources.<sup>2</sup> Fermanagh formed part of the northern proto-industrial 'linen complex' that extended to the west and south from its heartland in east Ulster. This may mean that the social and demographic processes in the county were unusual compared to other parts of Ireland (see Guinnane 1997: 83 and 163), but it can also be argued that scholars have underestimated the significance of proto-industrial, and other forms of artisan activity in rural Irish household economies before the Famine (see Clarkson 1996 and Gray 2005a). The 1821 census data for Fermanagh provide a useful opportunity to consider how rural industrial processes may have impacted on changing patterns of household formation and inheritance.<sup>3</sup>

The chapter begins with a brief overview of landholding patterns in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, and of the current state of knowledge about marriage, household formation and inheritance systems before and after the Famine. I then provide a summary account of the changing socio-economic environment in County Fermanagh during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before presenting a detailed cross-sectional analysis of social, family and household structures in Aghalurcher and Derryvullan North. In the second part of the paper, I show how the social patterns revealed by quantitative analysis manifested themselves as a set of dynamic social relationships within the smaller geographical units of townlands. I conclude by arguing that the changes in marriage and household

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<sup>2</sup> The 1821 census manuscripts are held at the National Archives of Ireland (CEN 1821/16 and 17) and are now available on microfilm (MFGS 34, 36 and 37), as are the Tithe Applotment Books (MFA 63/1-28) from the 1830s. Griffith's Primary Valuation is widely available and may now be consulted online on the 'Ask About Ireland' website: [http://griffiths.askaboutireland.ie/gv4/gv\\_start.php](http://griffiths.askaboutireland.ie/gv4/gv_start.php)

<sup>3</sup> For a general discussion see Crawford (1994a).

formation that occurred in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland might more fruitfully be understood as adaptations within a dynamic system of inheritance, than as consequences of a transformation from one system to another.

## **I. Landholding and Family Systems in Nineteenth Century Ireland**

Following the colonial plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the system of landholding in Ireland was formally organized on more ‘capitalist’ terms than in many other western European countries. As S. J. Connolly (1992: 55) observed: “the rural lower classes became subject to the same broad body of property law as in England, but with none of the multiple accretions of use rights and customary entitlements that offered the population there and elsewhere a measure of protection from the pressures of a rapidly developing market economy.” Ulster tenancies were normally leased for terms of three lives, or thirty-one years (Crawford 1977: 113), and increasingly, by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, were held from year to year “at will.” In principle, tenants did not have any legal right to renewal when leases expired, so that no head of household could assume that either he or his heirs would occupy the same plot of ground indefinitely. In practice, however, this insecurity of tenure was mitigated in two ways. First, the custom of ‘tenant right,’ granted occupiers not just the option to renew their tenancies, but also the right to sell their ‘goodwill’ to an incoming tenant if they did not renew the lease themselves. Irish tenants also attempted to ensure their continuity on the land through the ‘moral economy’ of the local community. Despite the introduction of legislative changes making it easier to eject tenants in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, modernizing estate agents often

found it difficult to find new occupiers for holdings from which the ‘rightful’ tenants had been evicted (Dowling 1999).<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes this moral economy was embedded in the landholding structure through the practice of granting joint leases to whole communities under the system known as ‘rundale.’ Rundale seems to have originated as a form of open-field cultivation in which joint landholders lived in nucleated settlements called ‘clachans,’ and farmed individual plots scattered throughout the ‘infield’ and ‘outfield.’ Under ‘changedale,’ the land was periodically redistributed within the rundale community in order to ensure that each family had equal access to land of the same quality. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, changedale was largely a folk memory (Johnson 1961: 167), and joint holdings were usually comprised of fixed strips farmed continuously by individual families (Dowling 1999: 186). Rights to membership of the rundale community seem to have been rooted in kinship. According to Dowling (1999: 186):

The fixed rundale situation may be one where land is not redistributed but labour decisions are still made collectively and other mobile capital resources are shared. With greater demographic intensity the scope of collective redistribution and shared labour was reduced from the entire village to smaller kin-based groups within the village. Parts of a townland might be fixed between families but the rundale system continued to operate within and between networks of families linked by marriage and descent.

Rundale certainly seems to have facilitated subdivision; at least one scholar has suggested that the rundale practices described by 19<sup>th</sup> century observers represented adaptations to demographic pressure rather than survivals of ancient farming systems (Whelan 1994). According to Dowling (1999: 196), as well as subdividing joint holdings

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<sup>4</sup> For an authoritative discussion of the custom of ‘tenant right,’ see Dowling 1999. The custom was exercised almost universally in the province of Ulster, of which County Fermanagh was a part (Guinnane and Miller 1996: 116)

amongst kin, rundale communities sublet portions of the outfield to outsiders, just as the ‘head tenants’ of compact holdings sublet to under-tenants using a range of leasing arrangements. Tenants might sub-lease portions of their holdings to cottiers in order to ensure an adequate supply of labour for their farms or proto-industrial enterprises, or simply to assist them in paying their rents to the head landlord. In the latter case, according to one estate agent, the tenant “who considers the farm all his right is seldom friendly to the little tenant who lives on a part he intended for a son on a future day” (quoted in Dowling 1999: 75). By the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, landlords and their agents were attempting to rationalize these arrangements by breaking up joint tenancies and by renting directly to under-tenants when leases came up for renewal. They faced a multi-layered tenantry with complex and overlapping sets of mutual obligations and competing interests that were largely opaque to outsiders.

This is the background against which Connell posited a system of household formation characterized by early and universal marriage together with partible inheritance – one that gradually gave way after the Famine to a stem family system characterized by the impartible transfer of land to a single male heir, late marriage and the dispersal of surplus siblings through emigration following the retirement or death of the patriarchal household head and his wife. Many of the components of Connell’s argument have been challenged by subsequent scholarship. We now know that Irish people did not marry at an exceptionally young age before the Famine (see Guinnane 1997: 82-83). Beginning in the 1970s, a number of scholars attempted to assess the prevalence of the stem-family system, as it was described by Arensberg and Kimball, through systematic analysis of early twentieth-century census returns (Gibbon and Curtin 1978; Fitzpatrick 1983;

Birdwell-Pheasant 1992; Corrigan 1993; Guinnane 1997). Generally speaking, they concluded that Irish farming households were characterized by relatively high proportions of extended families, but insufficient numbers of multiple-couple households to support the proposition that stem families were the norm (Guinnane 1997: 146). Aggregate data demonstrate that the number of family members per household declined, and that the subdivision of farms ceased over time during the post-Famine period but, as Guinnane (1997: 162-165) noted, neither of these trends necessarily imply anything about household formation systems.

Nor do they tell us anything about *whose* behaviour changed. According to Ó Gráda (1993: 182), “impartible inheritance was common practice on wealthier farms even before the Famine.” Evidence on settlement patterns also belies the image of a universal pattern of egalitarian subdivision. Johnson (1961: 167) emphasized the extent to which rundale settlements and individual holdings co-existed in the same areas over extended periods of time, and posited the existence of “two agricultural systems existing side by side, one wedded to life in clachans and the cultivation of open-field plots, and the other favouring scattered farmsteads with fields compactly arranged around them.” In a survey of townlands in County Monaghan (adjacent to County Fermanagh), Duffy (1977: 7) identified a wide range of landholding patterns, ranging from cases with a single large holding occupying either the entire area, or co-existing with a number of smallholdings, to “intensively parcellated” townlands with large numbers of both smallholding and landless households.

Scholars have proposed a number of explanations for these variations. Subdivision was clearly associated with land of marginal quality, and with poor estate

administration. There may have been ethnic differences in inheritance practices. Duffy (1977: 11) found that, in County Monaghan, “the holdings in the bigger farm districts were occupied mainly by tenants with Protestant surnames.” However, since Protestants were also more likely to occupy better quality land, it is not simple to disentangle the likely effects of cultural and economic factors in giving rise to this variation. McGregor (1992) demonstrated that the presence of rural industry was associated with the homogenization of landholdings. It is important to remember, however, that there were multiple pathways through which land subdivision could occur. In the vicinity of major linen markets, cottiers were able to use their earnings from weaving to outbid the head tenants for their holdings when leases came up for renewal (Crawford 1977: 135). Elsewhere there is evidence that farmers’ sons used the income from weaving to purchase farms of their own (Crawford 1994: 51). Finally, of course, landholders may have calculated that they could afford to subdivide their farms to a greater extent when additional income was available from the linen industry, and they may have been more likely to do so where the quality of land was poor or where rundale was practiced (Almquist 1979).

In light of the substantial variations in landholding patterns before the Famine, and of the absence of clear evidence of a change in household formation systems, a number of scholars have suggested that the Famine did not represent as great a rupture in inheritance practices as Connell’s account implied. As part of a complex analysis of the ‘lifelines’ of farm units in a south-western parish of County Tipperary (in south-central Ireland) between 1820 and 1970, Smyth (2000: 43) concluded that “the maintenance of the family name on the land was a central ambition of the majority of leaseholders in the



region,” both before and after the Famine. In contrast to Arensberg’s and Kimball’s stylized representation of the interplay between household formation systems and inheritance, Smyth (2000: 45) depicted a flexible set of practices that – while incorporating a clear preference for succession by the eldest son – implied that “most if not all means are justified in protecting the patrimony.” In an earlier call for treating succession systems as flexible practices, Ó Gráda (1993: 185) wrote that: “I find it instructive to regard both [partible and impartible] systems as the product, in different [socio-economic] circumstances, of a common desire for intrafamilial equity or ‘fairness.’” Birdwell-Pheasant (1998, 1999) has described the Irish succession system as “preferential inheritance with some partibility.” By this account the ‘home place’ and most of the land went to one heir, who occupied a substantial ‘long-cycle house.’ Other children might occupy less permanent, ‘short-cycle’ houses on the family land. According to Birdwell-Pheasant, then, the subdivision of landholdings before the Famine represented a proliferation of ‘short-cycle houses’ that was not necessarily inconsistent with an enduring objective of maintaining the patrimony.

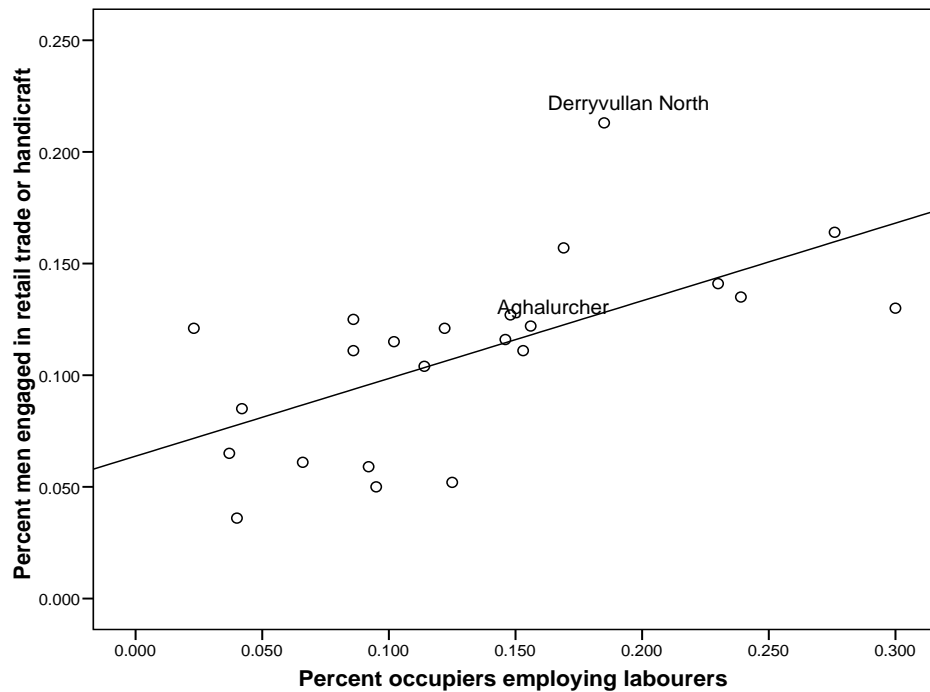
## **II. County Fermanagh before the Famine: An Introduction to the Study Area**

Like other counties within the northern proto-industrial zone, Fermanagh experienced significant social and economic change after about 1780, in the context of growing demand in Great Britain and the North American colonies for both agricultural and manufactured commodities. Compared to neighbouring counties, the value of linens sold in Fermanagh remained low throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although the county was incorporated to the regional linen complex at an early date through the supply of yarn and

cattle to the core weaving districts around Belfast (Crawford 1975). When Young visited the district around Florencecourt in 1776, he observed a rural-industrial pattern in which the production of butter and young cattle was combined with employing young women to spin: “Many servants are hired for spinning, at 12s. a quarter, who do the business of the house, and spin a hank a day” (Young 1892, p. 204). Crawford (1975, p. 248) suggested that the absence of weaving in the county “may be linked with the success of the cattle trade which gave the inhabitants a comfortable living without much labour.”

The end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the beginning of a shift towards tillage agriculture, in response to growing wartime demand from Great Britain (Bell 2004). In contrast to neighbouring counties, however, the parallel growth in demand for linens did not lead to an increase in the output of webs in County Fermanagh. Around Enniskillen Young (1892: 196) found that linen weaving had not taken ‘deep root,’ but was increasing. Paradoxically, after 1803, sales of linen cloth more than doubled in value at Fermanagh markets, during a period when other markets outside the core weaving zone, now centred on north Armagh, had begun to stagnate. Between 1816 and 1820, the average number of weavers attending Fermanagh’s linen markets increased from 150 to about 1000 (Crawford 2005: 149). So while Fermanagh remained a minor player in the weaving sector of the industry, more men in the county began to devote labour time to weaving, during a period of contraction and centralization in the industry as a whole. The reasons for this counter-intuitive trend in Fermanagh remain obscure, but it is possible that it can be accounted for an increasingly seasonal demand for male labour (Gray 2005b).

**Figure 1. Percent Men Engaged in Retail Trade or Handicraft by Percent Occupiers Employing Labourers. Rural Fermanagh Parishes 1831.**



Source: 1831 Census. Notes: 1. Parish of Enniskillen not included. 2. Parishes for which 1821 census manuscripts survive highlighted.

An analysis of the 1831 census data reveals a distinct regional pattern of agricultural and proto-industrial development in the county in the decade preceding the Famine. Parishes in the eastern part of the county were most developed, with relatively high proportions of farmers employing labourers, and of men engaged in trade or handicraft activities. By contrast, parishes to the south and west were characterized by fewer agricultural labourers and male artisans, but relatively high proportions of women engaged in spinning in 1841. A third pattern was observed in the parishes containing the two most important linen market towns in Fermanagh: Enniskillen and Derryvullan North (encompassing the linen

market of Irvinestown). Here the numbers of men engaged in retail trade or handicraft were comparatively high, with fewer men occupied as agricultural labourers (Gray 2005b). Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the employment of agricultural labourers and male participation in ‘retail trade or handicraft’ across Fermanagh parishes in 1831. It also shows where the two parishes for which 1821 census data survive were located on this axis.

The processes of agricultural intensification and proto-industrialization described above were accompanied by a significant increase in the population of County Fermanagh. The total number of houses increased from 11,983 in 1792 to 22,585 in 1821 (see Dickson, Ó’Gráda and Daultrey 1982) and 27,844 in 1841, implying that the rate of new household formation was slowing in the decades before the Famine. According to Arthur Young (1892: 188 and 205), in 1776 there was “a great deal of letting lands in the gross to middle men, who re-let it to others,” and also “great numbers” of farms taken in partnership in a western part of the county, but that in an eastern part, “*Tierney begs* [middlemen] are now done with.” By the 1830s, according to evidence from the Ordnance Survey Memoirs, “the operations of middlemen, and the rundale system, had become very uncommon,” at least partly due to the practice of ‘improvement’ on the part of landlords and their agents (Bell 2004: 505).

### **III. Households and the landholding structure in 1821: Aghalurcher and Derryvullan**

The original 1821 enumerators’ schedules survive for parts of two parishes in County Fermanagh: that portion of Derryvullan that lies in the barony of Lurg

(Derryvullan North), including the market town of Irvinestown, and the eastern part of Aghalurcher, comprising most of the townlands in the landed estate of Sir Arthur Brooke.

Lieutenant J. Greatorex, who compiled the Ordnance Survey memoir for Aghalurcher, was greatly impressed by the extent of “improvement” on the Brooke estate:

The late Sir Henry Brooke by his attention to the habits and comforts of his tenantry went far towards affording his dependants an opportunity of rising above the general humiliating state of the Irish farmer, and the effect is very evident in the very respectable appearance the present occupiers of the property at this day show. This improvement in the character of the peasantry has a correspondent effect in the improvement of agriculture (Greatorex 1990 [1835]: 10).

In Derryvullan, Lieutenant Robert Boteler (1992 [1835]: 34 and 36) was less effusive, but nonetheless impressed by the contrast between agriculture here and in the more northern parts of the barony of Lurg, commenting on the “well shaped” fields and hedgerows. He also mentioned the practice of landlords extracting “duty, given in addition to the rents, consisting of so many days gratis work with a man and a horse.” In Aghalurcher, rent was sometimes received in labour “to assist poor deserving men,” but here landlords also established cattle shows, provided premiums to encourage good farming, and assistance for improving farm buildings (Greatorex 1990 [1835]: 10 and 14).

In both parishes spinning and weaving represented important additional sources of income to rural households. According to my sample of the 1821 census manuscripts, 27% of Aghalurcher households, and 13% of Derryvullan households had at least one weaver resident. In Derryvullan, a further 12% of households were engaged in an artisan activity other than weaving. Eighty percent of all weavers in Derryvullan were heads of households, in contrast to Aghalurcher where sons accounted for more than half of all

weavers, and unrelated and otherwise unidentified residents accounted for a further 25%.<sup>5</sup>

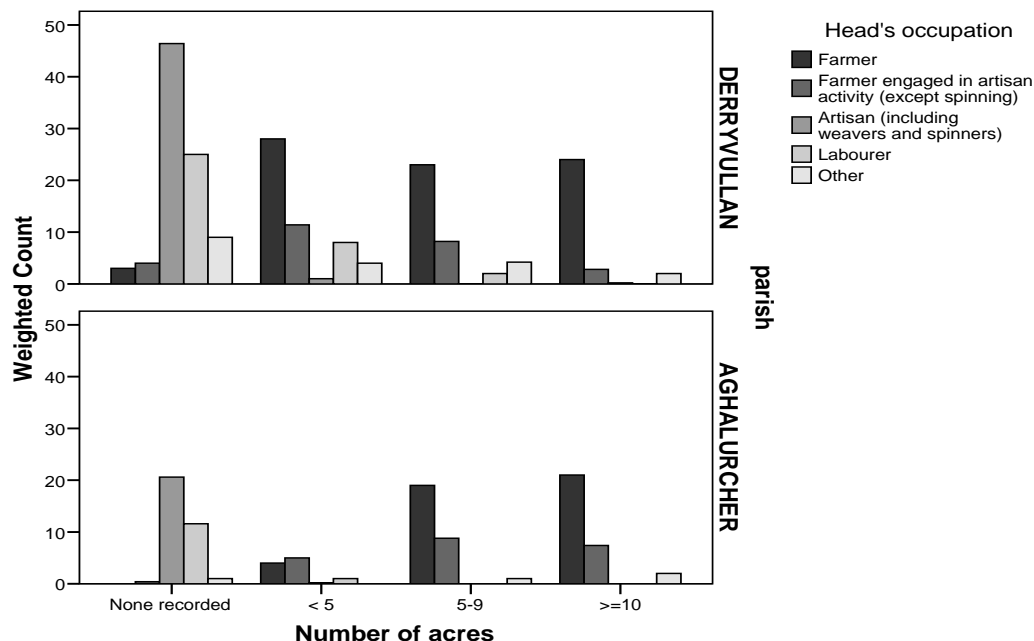
In 1835 Greatorex (1990 [1835]: 12) reported that: “In the leisure time intervening sowing and harvest time the more industrious among the young men apply themselves to weaving coarse linens,” but he also noted that weaving was no longer carried on to any extent, since the fall in value of webs. By contrast: “The female part of the community invariably spin and earn but a very scanty profit for their almost incessant application to the wheel.” This was the case even though: “Of late years the linen trade has become so depreciated that the profit earned by the spinner is very trifling. Probably a hard working woman at present could not earn above 4d per diem, a very poor remuneration for incessant labour.” Similarly, the magistrate J. E. Taylor (H.C. 1836, Poor Inquiry, Supplement to Appendix E: 354 [407]) wrote that the general condition of the “poorer classes” in Aghalurcher had not improved since 1815 because “the female part of the poor man’s family can bring their industry to little account since the deterioration of the linen manufacture; the women can make little or nothing by spinning (not more than 2d. a-day): from that resource many of the poor man’s comforts were derived.” However he also noted that many labourers “maintain themselves by weaving when out of other employment” (H. C. 1836 Poor Inquiry, Supplement to Appendix D: 354 [471]).

In Derryvullan, according to the Ordnance Survey memoir: “Hand-spinning and weaving formerly prevailed to a great extent in the cottages but have now nearly ceased as a means of adding to the small means of the country people.” The Reverend George Miller (H. C. 1836 Poor Inquiry, Supplement to Appendix D: 355 [471]) similarly

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<sup>5</sup> The analysis is based on a population sample of all households with at least one weaver resident, and a systematic sample with a random start of one in five households not engaged in weaving. When both samples are combined for the purpose of making inferences about the population in each parish as a whole, the weaving data are weighted by multiplying them by 0.2.

**Figure 2. Landholding size by occupation of household head in Derryvullan and Aghalurcher, 1821**



Source: 1821 Fermanagh Sample. For details, see footnote 1.

reported to the Poor Inquiry that “The wife and grown daughters used to work at spinning, but this occupation is almost withdrawn, as even a woman can now scarcely earn 2d. in a whole day.” Nonetheless, the yarn market at Irvinestown was still “tolerably attended” (Boteler 1992 [1835]: 37).

Figure 2 shows the distribution of households by landholding size and head of household’s occupation in each parish in 1821. It can be observed that while landless and micro-holdings of less than five acres accounted for nearly two-thirds of all households in Derryvullan, the distribution in Aghalurcher was bi-modal with proportionally fewer micro-holdings. However, while the median landholding size in Aghalurcher (8 acres)

was greater than that in Derryvullan (5 acres), the latter parish had a greater range of holding sizes, extending to 110 acres compared to a maximum of 40 in the former.<sup>6</sup> In Derryvullan, farmers engaged in weaving, or another artisan activity, tended to have somewhat smaller landholdings (median 4.3 acres) compared to those who did not (6 acres). The average age (44) of heads of landholding households engaged in weaving was about four years younger than landholders not so engaged (48). In Aghalurcher, farmers engaged in weaving did not differ from the rest according to landholding size, but their average age was six years older (51 compared to 45), and they were more likely to have sons of working age living at home (71 percent compared to 48% of households). Twenty-five percent of all landless households in Derryvullan, and forty-one percent in Aghalurcher, were headed by spinners.

Despite the presence of improving landlords, the responses to the Poor Inquiry imply that subletting was still practised in Aghalurcher in the 1830s (H. C. 1836 Poor Inquiry, Supplement to Appendix F: 354). According to the Reverend R. Russell: “From 10 to 30 acres is generally the extent of farms set by the head landlords; and from 2 to 10 acres are generally set by the head tenants to under-tenants.” Taylor calculated similarly that the average size of farms rented by the “head landlord” was just over 19 acres; he worried about “a most lamentable subdividing and breaking down of large farms into small ones, taking place to an extent that it is fearful to contemplate the result of.” Greatorex (1990 [1835]: 14), however, found that “there is little or no subletting practised in this parish, they [the landlords] setting their faces against so ruinous a custom.”

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<sup>6</sup> One statute acre is equal to 0.405 hectares. Unfortunately, a number of other measurements, including Cunningham or Plantation acres (1.29 statute) and Irish acres (1.62 statute) were in widespread use during this period. Considerable caution should therefore be exercised when making comparisons across space or time.



In Derryvullan, Boteler (1992 [1835]: 36) observed no great social distinctions amongst the occupiers of land, describing them as “generally speaking, cottiers.” Miller (H. C. 1836 Poor Inquiry, Supplement to Appendix E: 355 [471]) reported similarly to the Poor Inquiry that the farmers were “nearly all of one class,” and that the number of labourers was “not considerable because the land is chiefly distributed among very small farmers.” While this observation is inconsistent with the 1821 census evidence showing that 17% of household heads were labourers, it may perhaps be explained by the tiny size of so many landholdings, and by the fact that those living on both micro-holdings and garden plots were frequently also engaged in by-employments. Many of those occupying the smallest plots of land lived in and around the town of Irvinestown where, according to Boteler (1992 [1835]): 37): “Most of the inhabitants hold some small patch of ground, by the produce of which they either add to their comforts or increase the profits of their various trades.” According to Miller (Poor Inquiry, Supplement to Appendix F: 355), farms in Derryvullan were “generally held from the head landlord.”

Table 1 provides a summary of the distribution of household types in each parish, using the Hammel-Laslett (1974) classification system. Data from other studies of pre-Famine census fragments, and from an analysis of the 1911 census for Ireland, are provided for comparison. There was a greater proportion of extended family households in Derryvullan compared to Aghalurcher. Furthermore, just 49 percent of simple family households in Derryvullan were comprised of married couples with children, compared to 61 percent in Aghalurcher. However, about one in five (21%) Aghalurcher households had at least one

**Table 1. Household Structure in Selected Areas, 1821, 1841 and 1911.**

Household Classification	Aghalurcher 1821 <sup>a</sup>		Derryvullan 1821 <sup>b</sup>		Meath & Galway 1821 <sup>c</sup>		Killashandra, Cavan, 1841 <sup>d</sup>		Ireland 1911 <sup>e</sup>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	n	%	N	%
Solitaries	3	2.9	7	3.3	36	3.5	33	0.5	165	6.6
No Family	3	3.1	7	3.5	39	3.7	23	0.3	315	12.6
Simple Family	85	82.1	148	69.3	679	65.8	6075	90.2	1,547	62.0
Extended Family	10	9.9	39	18.5	203	19.6	141	2.1	427	17.1
Multiple Family	1	1.0	7	3.1	77	7.4	466	6.9	38	1.5
Unclassifiable	1	1.0	5	2.3	-	-	-	-	3	0.1
Total	103	100.0	213	100.0	1034	100.0	6738	100.0	2495	100

Sources: a. Aghalurcher and Derryvullan 1821: Author's 1821 Fermanagh Sample. Weighted Ns.

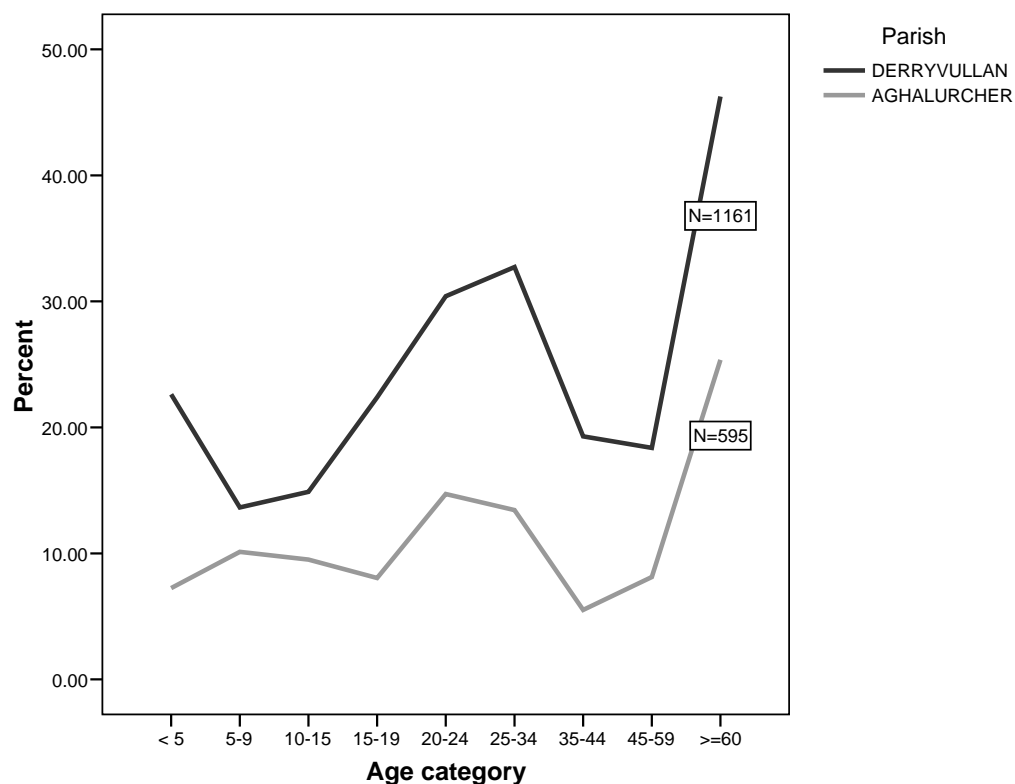
b. Meath and Galway 1821: Carney 1980, p. 157. One in six sample of census fragments.

Aggregated across disparate study areas. c. Killashandra: O'Neill 1984, p. 199. Population data.

d. Ireland 1911: Corrigan 1993, p. 71. Stratified probability sample. See n. 1, p. 70.

resident person with no clear relationship to the household head, compared to 6 percent of households in Derryvullan. If, as seems likely, at least some of those unidentified residents were relatives, then the proportion of extended households in Aghalurcher may be underestimated. Comparison with the 1911 sample seems to confirm a point made by Guinane (1997): the real change in household structure since the Famine lay in the increased proportions of solitaires and no-family households, caused by rising rates of celibacy from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Returning to the Fermanagh samples, there were no statistically significant differences in the odds of a household being extended according to landholding status, or landholding size, in either parish. Similarly, weaving households were no less likely to be extended, in either case. As [Figure 3](#) shows, the likelihood of living in an extended family household was linked to life course stage, but no evidence of a link to inheritance strategies can be gleaned from the census data.

**Figure 3. Percent People Living in Extended Family Households by Age Category, Derryvullan and Aghalurcher, 1821**



Source: 1821 Fermanagh Sample

Unfortunately, the 1821 census enumerators did not record the marital status of individuals, so this can only be inferred from their relationship to the head of household. [Table 2](#) provides estimates of the percentages of men and women who were married in each parish, in selected age categories. It suggests a possible lower average age at marriage for some women in Aghalurcher, but this must be treated with extreme caution given the small number of cases, and also given the proportionally small size of the 35-39 year old male cohort. The latter is consistent with the pattern of emigration at the time

(c.f. Ó Gráda 1994: 75; Collins 1982: 140. See [Appendix](#) for more detail on age at marriage).

**Table 2. Percent men and women married in selected age cohorts, Aghalurcher and Derryvullan, 1821.**

Age Category	Men			Women		
	Weighted N	N Married	% Married	Weighted N	N Married	% Married
<b>Aghalurcher</b>						
20-24	29	3	10.3	38	6	15.8
25-29	25	7	28.0	26	13	50.0
30-34	19	11	57.9	20	11	55.0
35-39	7	6	Complete	16	14	87.5
40-44	15	12	80.0	17	14	82.4
<b>Derryvullan</b>						
20-24	66	8	12.1	65	17	26.2
25-29	41	16	39.0	47	16	34.0
30-34	36	19	52.8	32	22	68.8
35-39	36	26	72.7	47	29	61.7
40-44	25	21	84.0	35	28	80.0

Source: Estimates based on 1821 Fermanagh Sample. For details see n. 2.

In summary, my analysis of landholding and household structures in the 1821 census data, together with evidence from the published 1831 census and from the Ordnance Survey memoirs, demonstrates the existence of two distinct patterns of proto-industrial embedding in Aghalurcher and Derryvullan. Aghalurcher was characterized by a bifurcation between a class of farmers occupying modest landholdings and a landless spinning and labouring class. Linen weaving was carried on mainly in farmers' households by sons and unrelated male dependents. Of the thirty-six weavers who were heads of households in Aghalurcher, more than half were landless. In this context, weaving may have represented a strategy of diversifying household income while also maximizing the amount of male labour available for agriculture by delaying the departure of older sons from the household. Farmers who wanted to avoid subdividing their land

may also have elected to provide non-inheriting sons with a trade. An examination of which sons were engaged in weaving provides some evidence in favour of this supposition. Of the 105 sons living in weaving households with more than one adult son in Aghalurcher, 61 percent of youngest sons were weavers, compared to just 5% of oldest sons.

In Derryvullan, by contrast, the prevailing socio-economic pattern was one of micro landholding and landless households, whose occupants survived through the flexible allocation of family labour to agriculture and rural industry, alongside a small, but not insignificant number of larger farmers who employed labourers. Weaving was carried on mainly by household heads on micro-holdings, who tended to be somewhat younger than other landholders. Household structures in Derryvullan exhibited forms of extension and fragmentation with no clear relationship to inheritance strategies. Instead, they are reminiscent of those classically described by Medick (1981: 59) as “a private means to redistribute the poverty of the nuclear family by way of the family and kinship system.”

In the next section, I shift the perspective away from cross-sectional quantitative analysis at the level of individual households, to a more qualitative examination of the distribution and composition of household complexes in two townlands – one in each parish. Townlands are vernacular territories surviving from the medieval period that became “the basic unit for tenurial purposes... [and] for the collection of data by central and local government from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries.” Originally, they “probably...operated as the equivalent of a family holding” (Duffy 1995: 29). In his detailed study of a parish in County Tipperary, Smyth (2000: 15) found that all

landholdings were “locked into and partially administered within the townland framework” even at the peak of the farming population in the period immediately preceding the Famine. In Clogheen-Burncourt, “The landlord’s private farm alone transcends these ancestral boundaries – symbolizing the lack of congruence between the estate-administered landholding system and the hidden forces of territorially-based kinship and neighbourhood systems which struggle for expression within and between these townlands” (Smyth 2000: 15). In this context, detailed qualitative examination of the census schedules for individual townlands represents a reasonable approach to identifying relationships within and across rural households in 1821.

#### **IV. Varieties of rural industrial embedding: the townlands of Doonan and Crann**

In order to facilitate the selection of townlands for detailed analysis, I carried out a simple *k*-means cluster analysis of all townlands according to the numbers of household heads who were identified as farmers employing weavers, farmer-weavers, and weavers (who were usually landless) in each townland where at least one household was engaged in weaving in 1821. Four main clusters of rural industrial townland were identified in this way:

1. Farmers employing weavers with some farmer-weavers (11 cases, all in Aghalurcher)
2. Farmer-weavers (9 cases, all in Derryvullan)
3. Landless weavers with some farmers employing weavers (10 cases, 6 in Derryvullan)
4. Sparse weaving households of any kind (53 cases, 38 in Derryvullan)

On the basis of this information, I selected the townland of Crann as an example of the distinctive “farmer” pattern of rural industrialization in Aghalurcher (Cluster 1) and that of Doonan as an example of the “farmer-weaver” pattern that was characteristic of

**Table 3. Population and Landholding in Doonan and Crann, 1821-1862.**

Parish and Townland	1821	1832	1841	1851	1861	1862
Derryvullan North						
- DOONAN						
Population	107		138	108	31	
Households	19		23	21	8	
Landed Households	12	18				6
Median Landholding Size*	5	3				6
Aghalurcher						
- CRANN						
Population	143		185	55	55	
Households	25		31	8	12	
Landed Households	12	8				8
Median Landholding Size*	8	11				18

Sources: 1821 Fermanagh Sample, Detailed Townland Datafile. Tithe Applotment Books Fermanagh 1832. H.C. 1862 [3204] Census of Ireland 1861.

\* The data on landholding size should be treated with great caution, because both the townland boundaries and types of acres recorded may have changed over time, or have been recorded inconsistently before 1862.

Derryvullan (Cluster 2). Table 3 provides summary information on the distribution of population and households in the two townlands between 1821 and 1862

*Doonan* is situated in the south-western part of Derryvullan North. It experienced continued population growth between 1821 and 1841, and a comparatively modest decline in population and household numbers during the Famine decade. During the subsequent decade, however, there was a sharp reduction both in population and in the number of landholdings. *Crann* (or Cran) is a townland on the north-western border of Aghalurcher. The growth in population between 1821 and 1841 must have entailed an increase in the proportion of landless households, since the total number of households

grew while the number of landholdings was reduced to 8 in 1832. That figure remained stable through 1862, but the population declined by more than two-thirds between 1841 and 1851. The landless class of agricultural labourers and spinners had effectively disappeared during the Famine years.

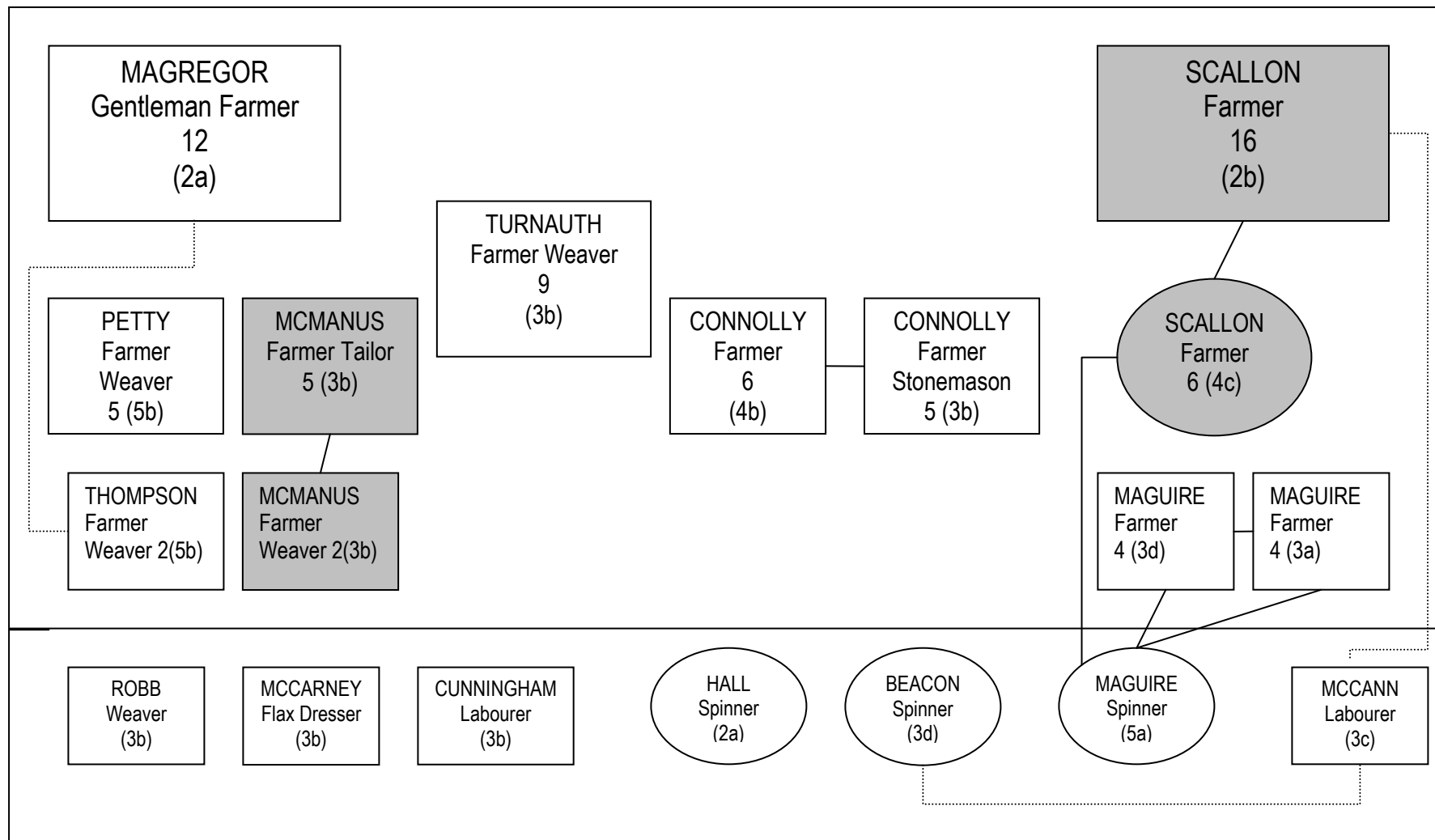
Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the social structures of Doonan and Crann in 1821. Each shape represents a household; oval shapes represent households headed by women; shaded shapes illustrate family names surviving to 1862 (amongst landholders). The numbers without parentheses refer to the acreage reported in the 1821 census schedules, while those within parentheses refer to the Hammel-Laslett classification system. The solid lines represent family relationships that can be inferred from the census data; dotted lines represent more tenuous possibilities. Table 4 summarizes what can be inferred by comparing family names from the 1821 census schedules against the Tithe Applotment (1832) and Valuation (1862) records.

Three family-household complexes implying forms of land subdivision are identifiable in the data for Doonan. The Scallon-Maguire complex links the largest landholding in the townland to a number of smaller holdings through likely relationships of marriage and descent. At the heart of the complex, we might infer that the Maguire family have subdivided their holding to allow Thomas (24) to set up a household with his new wife on four acres, while the remaining four acres continue to be occupied by his widowed mother Margaret (62), and apparently unmarried younger brothers and sisters. It is notable that Margaret's son, John (20) is named in the census record as the head of household on this parallel holding. By 1832 Thomas appears to have increased his holding to 11 acres, while John is now recorded as holding just 3 acres in this townland.



Neither appears in the 1862 records for Doonan but, interestingly, a Thomas Maguire occupied 27 acres, and a John Maguire 10, in the nearby townland of Drummal.

**Figure 4. Social Structure of Doonan, 1821**



**Figure 5. Social Structure of Crann, 1821**

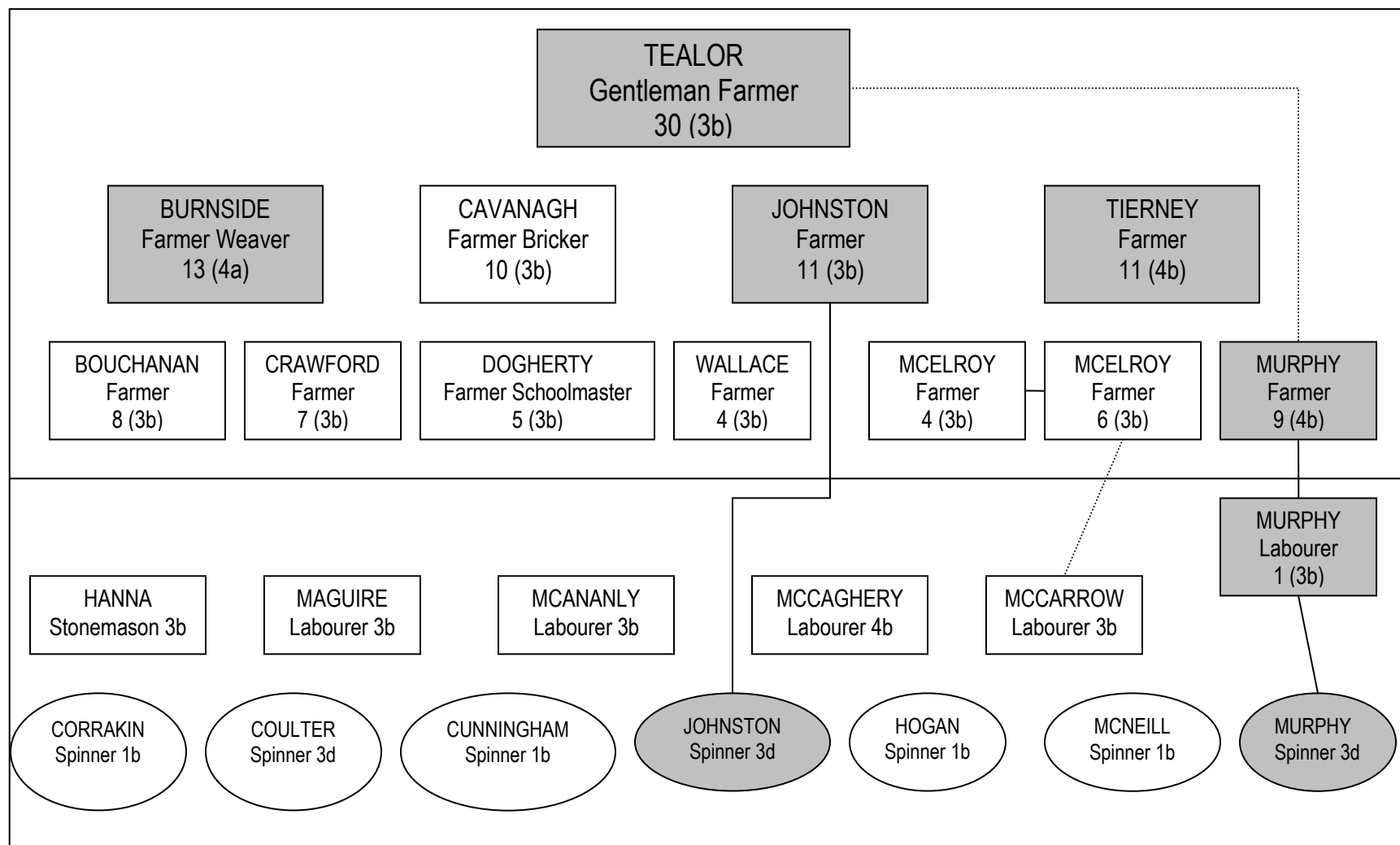


Table 4. Record of Family Names in Doonan and Crann, 1821-1862

	1821		1832		1862		Landholding in nearby townlands?
Family Name	N Holdings	Acres	N Holdings	Acres	N Holdings	Acres	
DOONAN							
Scallon	2	16 & 6	2	12& 12	1	3	
Maguire	2	4 & 4	3	11, 1 & 2			Yes
Connolly	2	6 & 5	2	3 & 3			Yes
Turnauth	1	9					Possible(Tumath)
McManus	2	5 & 2	3	4, 3 & 2	1	4	Yes
Petty	1	5	1	4			
Thompson	1	2	1	1			
Magregor	1	12					
CRANN							
Taylor	1	30	1	30	1	55	
Burnside	1	13	1	4	1	61	Yes
Cavanagh	1	10					
Johnston	1	11	1	11	2	7&3	Yes
Tierney	1	11	1	11	1	18	Yes
Murphy	2	9&1			1 (Joint)	22	
McElroy	2	4&6					Yes
Wallace	1	4					
Dogherty	1	5					
Crawford	1	7					
Bouchanan	1	8					

Sources: See n. 1.

It seems plausible that the elderly Eleanor Maguire (90) was Margaret's mother-in-law. She lived with her daughter Jane (47) in a house without land attached, together with Jane's daughter Sarah Bell (who may already have been a widow at 24), and 5 year old William Scallon, whose relationship to Jane is not recorded. However, Jane was almost certainly a sister of Ann Maguire (40) and widowed Margaret Scallon (42), who farmed six acres in 1821 with Margaret's sons Patrick (19) and James (17). Margaret's husband had probably been a brother of George (40) and Thomas (45) Scallon, who farmed the largest holding (16 acres) in this complex (and in the townland of Doonan),

together with their uncle Charles (61). In 1832, George Scallon continued to hold 16 acres while Margaret appears to have increased her holding to 12 acres.

The Connolly family-household complex suggests a similar pattern of subdivision, whereby a married man (James, 42) occupied a holding of similar size to his younger, apparently unmarried brother (George, 32) who continued to live with their elderly parents. In this case, however, there were also three young grandchildren living in the parental household, and the father (James, 74, a stonemason) was named as the household head. In 1832, George was recorded as occupying three acres of land, and a Henry Connolly, whose relationship to the family cannot be inferred from the census data, occupied another three. The Connollys appear to have disappeared from the townland by 1862, although a George Connolly occupied five acres and a house in an adjoining townland. The McManus family-household complex represents a similar pattern of land subdivision at a later stage of the family lifecycle in 1821: here, both brothers (Felix and Thomas) were married men in their fifties, with adult sons and daughters in their twenties together with some younger children. Both were engaged in artisanal activities – Felix being a tailor and Thomas a weaver. By 1832 they appear to have re-divided the land in order to accommodate Hugh, Thomas's second oldest son on two acres, while Felix and Thomas occupied approximately 3 and 4 acres respectively. Two women with the McManus surname were present in the townland in 1862, but their relationship to the family members recorded in 1821 is unknown.

In addition to the three 'family-household complexes' already described, there were four other landholding households in Doonan in 1821. The 'gentleman farmer' Magregor family, occupying 12 acres of land and 30 acres of bog, had disappeared from

the townland by 1832. The remaining three holdings were occupied by farmer-weavers. The most substantial was George Turnauth who occupied 9 acres with his wife and adult sons and daughters. The family had left the townland by 1832, but an Edward Tumath, occupying 13 acres in an adjacent townland in 1862 was possibly George's oldest son. Peter and Ann Petty's household included their daughter Eleanor Martin (24) and five year old grandson, Michael Martin. We must guess that she had been widowed or deserted. The Petty family name does not appear in the records for Doonan after 1821, but Nicholas Petty, Peter's second oldest son, appears to have secured 5 acres in an adjoining parish by 1832. Finally, John Thompson's daughter-in-law Martha lived with her husband and his family on two acres in 1821. The family continued to occupy a tiny holding in the townland in 1832, but had disappeared from the records by 1862.

Whereas the landholding structure of Doonan exhibited a complex pattern of both vertical and horizontal social relationships mediated through kinship that of Crann suggests a more clearly class-divided community, in which the role of kinship in structuring relationships between households is less visible. An examination of Figure 5 immediately suggests the greater significance of landless households in its social structure compared to that of Doonan. The prevalence of female-headed, spinner households is also striking, as is the predominance of simple family household structures. At the 'top' of Crann's social structure, the most substantial landholder was 60 year old James Tealor (Taylor), a "gentleman farmer" whose son John Edward must have taken over as head of household shortly after 1832, since he is identified as a magistrate occupying the "gentleman's seat" at Cranbrooke in 1835 (Greatorex 1990 [1835]: 8 and 10), and we have met him earlier through his responses to the Poor Enquiry.

Next to the Taylor family, Crann was characterized by the presence of four “strong” farmer households each occupying more than 10 acres of land. Three of these families – each of which was engaged in weaving in 1821 - appear to have survived into the 1860s. The Burnside household was occupied by a stem-extended family in 1821, headed by thirty-two year old farmer-weaver James whose elderly parents lived in the same house as his wife and young children. In 1832 the only Burnside occupying land in Crann was a Matthew - with no relationship to James identifiable from the 1821 census record – and who held just four acres. In 1862, however, the family name reappears with the Reverend William Burnside who was then a very substantial landholder with 61 acres in Crann and other holdings in adjacent townlands. Both the Johnston and Tierney families appear to have succeeded in transmitting their holdings to their descendents across the Famine decades. An Andrew Johnston, possibly the younger son of William (who was head of household in 1821) occupied 7 acres in 1862, while an Anne Johnston held nearly three. In 1821, fifty-six year old Patrick Tierney farmed 11 acres with his wife Isabella (also 56), their four adult children, and two year old grandson. His oldest resident son John (24) was a weaver. In 1862 a John Tierney occupied two holdings in the townland of 18 and 24 acres respectively.

In light of the data from the Poor Inquiry discussed above, it is likely that the more substantial farmers in Crann leased more land than they occupied, renting some acres to undertenants. This would explain why three of the surviving families occupied considerably larger holdings in 1862, and also why none of the six smaller landholders appeared in the Tithe Applotment books in 1832, although one of the family names (Murphy) does reappear as a joint leaseholder with another party in 1862. Within the

social layer of smallholders in Crann there were two ‘household complexes’ reminiscent of those in Doonan. Hugh Murphy (60) occupied 9 acres with his wife Anne (61), son John (20) and two adult daughters. Also living in the same household were his young granddaughter Jane (10), and 62 year old Thomas Murphy, described as a labourer and “lodger.” Thirty-two year old James Murphy was described as a “labourer” although he occupied one acre of land with his wife Alice (28) and three young children. Forty-year old flax-spinner Catherine Murphy lived separately with her 70 year-old mother. The McElroy household complex was similar to that of the McManuses in Doonan, with two male householders of similar age occupying equivalent landholdings. However, there were no surviving McElroys holding lands in Crann in 1862, although the name appears frequently in nearby townlands.

In summary, this qualitative examination of the landholding structure in two different townlands has accomplished a number of objectives when interpreted in light of the cross-sectional, quantitative analyses at the level of households and parishes. First, it has highlighted the extent to which the land fragmentation that accompanied rural industrial activity could evolve along distinct pathways leading to different social formations and outcomes. Under the “farmer-weaver” pattern of rural industrial embedding illustrated by Doonan, land fragmentation seems to have occurred through the subdivision and reallocation of land within family-household complexes. With proportionally few landless occupiers, small-holders depended primarily on family members to meet their labour requirements, whether in agriculture or in rural industrial activity. Under the “farmer” pattern illustrated by Crann, by contrast, land subdivision occurred primarily because strong farmers (who employed their sons and others as



weavers) sublet holdings to undertenants. They also generated employment for a comparatively high number of landless labourers and spinners. The analysis in sections II and III above indicated that a range of factors are likely to have given rise to these territorial differences, including distance from major linen markets, quality of land and the type of agriculture engaged in, and forms of estate supervision.

Second, the qualitative analysis has revealed the extent to which different patterns of land-holding and land transmission could co-exist within small geographical boundaries. Third, it has demonstrated that the relationship between land subdivision and household structure was not that predicted by Connell's classic account. On the contrary, the subdivision and reallocation of land in Doonan seems to have given rise to greater household complexity as family groups sought to accommodate marriage and household formation on the part of some sons, while also providing support on the land for unmarried or widowed siblings and elderly parents. By contrast, in Crann where there was a pattern of subletting rather than subdivision, simple family households predominated in 1821, most likely in the context of high levels of out-migration.

## **V. Conclusion**

Three conceptual obstacles have stood in the way of understanding historical family and household formation systems in Ireland. First, as Ó Gráda pointed out, there has been a widespread tendency (beginning with Connell's analysis) to treat Irish behaviour before the Famine as a helpless response to extreme poverty and lack of control over their circumstances, rather than as a strategic set of adaptations to the changing demographic and economic context. According to this view, marriage was an

“inferior good” and no attempt was made to adapt to deteriorating conditions by modifying patterns of family and household formation that were inherently weak and transitory. The second obstacle derives from the stylized, structural-functionalist representation of the stem family that Irish scholars, including Connell, inherited from Arensberg and Kimball. More recent scholarship has emphasized the flexibility and adaptability of the stem-family system, including a capacity for “branching out” when circumstances permitted (Fauve-Chamoux and Arrizabalaga 2005). As Schlumbohm (1996: 93) observed, people modified the “rules” surrounding family and household formation to meet the challenges posed by changing conditions.

A third conceptual obstacle has been the failure to theorize the interaction between household formation processes and kinship and neighbourhood groups within the wider community (Plakans and Wetherell 2003). Scholars have drawn attention to the importance of local networks for meeting the seasonal labour requirements of small farm households, and for providing sustained assistance in times of economic crisis (Hannan; Slater and McDonough 1994). It might prove useful, therefore, to think about the kinship environment as a set of potential resources or constraints around which decisions about household formation were made under different socio-economic circumstances. According to Smyth (2000: 29) there were strategic advantages to increasing the size of the local kin group during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He found that farming families with larger kin groups were best placed to take advantage of opportunities for land acquisition because they controlled a greater share of the local resource base. Birdwell-Pheasant (1999: 115) argued, similarly, that insecurity of tenure in the pre-

Famine context led to the proliferation of short-cycle houses as “the balance in the nexus of family and place shifted toward the family as the only reliable source of security.”

The analysis in this chapter has emphasized the extent to which the processes of land subdivision associated with rural industrialization evolved along multiple pathways, leading to diverse social structures and settlement patterns, even within a single county in Ireland during the decades preceding the Famine. In order to make sense of the household formation processes that gave rise to this diversity, we may need to change our focus away from models that rest on stylized assumptions about “rules” in favour of those that emphasize flexibility in response to changing circumstances, and that recognize the extent to which relationships within wider community and kin circles formed part of the set of resources and constraints that framed people’s actions.

Viewed from this perspective, the growth in employment afforded by the linen industry (especially in Ulster and the northern counties of Leinster and Connacht), and the shift to tillage from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards increased the potential for families to settle more offshoots locally, without necessarily weakening their foothold on the land. Indeed, the growing demand for labour may have represented an opportunity to strengthen their presence within the community by expanding the kinship circle. However, during the time period discussed in this article, farm families were confronted with enormous challenges: declining opportunities for employment in both domestic industry and agriculture, changing expectations and demands from landlords and, not least, the threat of total household failure due to starvation and illness. In this context, it might be argued that a remarkable number of families succeeded in maintaining their name on the land, and that this success may have been due to the flexibility and strength

of Irish household formation systems, as well as to inherent economic advantage and sheer good fortune

## **Appendix 1.**

By inferring marital status from relationship to the household head, and assuming that apparently unrelated residents were single, the singulate mean age at marriage for women can be calculated as 27.4 in Aghalurcher and 28.8 in Derryvullan. However, because of the relatively high numbers of lodgers and other residents who were neither servants, nor clearly related to the household head, the proportions married are likely to be underestimated by this method, so that the true age at marriage was almost certainly younger (see Gray 2005a: . Fitzpatrick (1985: 130) calculated a SMAM of 26.0 for women in Ulster in 1821 using published data from the 1841 census. Neither Fitzpatrick's estimates, nor my own, take any account of the likely effects of emigration. An alternative (but also flawed) estimate of the average age at marriage for women may be obtained by calculating the gap between the ages of married women in their twenties and thirties and that of their eldest resident child (Ó Gráda 1994: 9). This implies an average age at marriage of 22 in Derryvullan and just 20 in Aghalurcher.

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